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ABSTRACT

Problems encountered in teaching English as a second language to Navaho children are primarily due to inadequate teacher education. The teacher needs a genuine understanding of what is going on, what he is doing, and why he is doing it; he must have as much knowledge as possible of the pupils with whom he works. Too often English as a second language is taught in a vacuum and is generally taken to mean the choral repetition of rather colorless sentences which have little relationship to specific learning needs of Navaho children but which are somehow believed to reflect the "structure" of the language. Teacher training must be improved so that teachers may develop sufficient understanding of the English language and of language instruction methodology. Appropriate materials in a sequential relationship must be developed, and teachers must be given freedom to use common sense in relating the materials to the current needs of the pupils. A bibliography is included. (Author/VM)

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PRACTICALITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH-AS-A-SECOND LANGUAGE TO NAVAJO CHILDREN

Speech given at the 1971 TESOL Convention at New Orleans
*by Mrs. Faralie S. Spell

Experience, so far as the Navajo Area of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is concerned, has proven that the assumption that speaking and being educated in English as one's first language qualifies one to teach it as a second language is erroneous. To learn a second language is a task that requires, on the part of the learner, a large amount of time and a considerable infusion of effort, especially if the second language is to be used as the primary language for learning in school. On the part of the teacher, it requires understanding of the language and of second language-learning principles, diligence in applying those principles in the classroom and superhuman patience.

Problems encountered in TESL to Navajo children are primarily due to inadequate teacher education in the field of what has been termed ESL but which I prefer to specify as teaching the language arts in a second language.

Research studies, to which I shall refer in more detail later, indicate a shortage of even adequately educated teachers in ESL. In fact, preparation for teaching the culturally different in any area is sadly inadequate. American education, to which colleges and universities devote almost full attention, stresses values in direct contrast, and I might add even in conflict, with values held in varying degrees by the Indian. Such highly esteemed values as agressiveness, competition, individual personal gain, outsmarting your fellow man, and verbal ability and agility are instilled in the non-Indian from the time he is able to comprehend. The Indian child attending a school where these values are part of the school program and are stressed by the non-Indian teacher is thrown into a foreign situation. He has no experiential background comparable to it and consequently, retardation is built into the educational program as far as he is concerned. [1]

Training programs are practically non-existent, which on the one hand are geared to the same developmental objectives set forth for all children, but which employ methods and content for reaching those goals that are culturally related and adapted to the children's developmental assets and deficits, and on the other hand help the child to relate successfully to the world beyond. Training and education are lacking which would prepare teachers to reflect the positiveness of the Indian's contributions to the greater society. These deficiencies in educating teachers to work with the culturally different coupled with the lack of sensitive teachers prepared to help the child to function in English as his second language insure a negative self-concept on the part of many Indian children.

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These educational problems are difficult to overcome. They cannot be eliminated by short-term training sessions. Infact, the problems can be intensified, if a result of that training in ESL is a misinterpretation of the underlying assumptions, methods, and goals of current ESL instruction. Too much is involved in effectively teaching the language arts to Navajo children for teachers to be either enthusiastic or successful in accomplishing the task with only short-term training. What can very likely result is that lessons become dull, mechanical, and unimaginative.

Teachers cannot grasp a clear understanding of all that is involved in teaching the language arts, if only short-term training is provided. In such a situation, teaching the language arts cannot be viewed as an integral part of the curriculum serving the linguistic needs of other subject areas. Rather, it is more likely to be taught in a vacuum and to lose its relevance in the eyes of both teacher and pupil.

To further support this thesis, may I quote from Report of the Evaluation of English as a Second Language Programs in Navajo Area Schools conducted by TESOL, 1969-70:

> "More and regular teacher education is clearly essential. There are too many teachers who do not understand the basic principles of ESL methodology and have too little conception of how ... materials ... can be adapted to meet a specific teaching situation. Because short-term workshops and seminars have obviously failed to provide adequate training, we recommend that longer programs be utilized." [2]

Differences do exist between learning one's first language and a second language. Learning a second language includes reasoning, analyzing, generalizing, and understanding what one is doing. It includes understanding the presuppositions about the world that are tied to many of our utterances. These need to be explained along with the logic of the particular learning situation.[3] If a teacher doesn't have this kind of knowledge, how can he help children to acquire it?

The teacher is the most important single element in any teaching situation. Certainly, attitude and personality determine considerably the extent to which any program, no matter how well formulated, can be carried out, but to an even greater extent will education and training, skill as a teacher, and linguistic ability effect the teaching-learning situation.[4] Consequently, if the teacher is not adequately educated, the pupils and the program suffer.

More important than any method or any material is the person responsible for applying the method or implementing the material. Any time an attempt is made to lead anyone to believe that there exists only one acceptable method or only one set of materials or techniques, a grave injustice is being done. All any set of materials can do, or should do, is to set down the principles and practices which have been found effective by a representative group of people for a representative situation. Not even any curriculum design, regardless of how sophisticated or high powered

it may seem on paper, can succeed without good teaching and good teaching cannot result without education and training. Pupil growth depends on professional growth.

Several national studies indicated that 66.3% of elementary teacher respondents involved in the studies had majors in education. Only 1/3 had an English major program at any stage of their academic preparation, and only 1/10 a major in a foreign language for one of their degrees. A few more had minors in English or a foreign language, but none of this helps much in teaching English-as-a-second language.[5] Although this situation may have changed some since these studies, our experience indicates there is still a real lack of qualified teachers.

A further indication of deficiencies in teacher education programs is the fact that the use of sessions of short duration for orienting and retraining teachers in TESL have greatly increased the last several years.[6] These programs vary greatly in duration, purpose, and organization.

At a conference on short-term training held at the Center of Applied Linguistics, it was made clear that these programs could in no way give the depth of preparation necessary. There is need for real caution in setting objectives that can be achieved in short-term training.

Such programs of necessity must have limited objectives, cover restricted areas, and be precise and specific. They cannot be expected to provide the necessary practical experience and theoretical framework necessary for an adequate understanding of the linguistic, psychological, and methodological aspects of second language learning.

A recommendation of the conference was to concentrate on the how rather than the why. To at least admonish caution in doing so, if not to refute the recommendation, I quote again from the TESOL Evaluation Report:

> "Many teachers freely acknowledge and others clearly demonstrate their lack of confidence in what they are doing in their ESL classes. Most of the teachers with several years experience in BIA schools have had ESL training, but it has frequently been in the nature of very short-term seminars and workshops. Clearly this training has not been at all adequate."

Since major emphasis in much of the short-term training provided in an effort to give Navajo Area teachers at least some help in overcoming their education deficiencies has been on the how and I have no reason to question the quality of the training, I am convinced that from a practical standpoint primary emphasis must be on the why with secondary emphasis on the how.

Some of the problems which Navajo pupils encounter in the language arts which require well educated and trained teachers to help them overcome relate to:

1. Content, concepts, and vocabulary

2. A limited experiential base
3. Motivation, attention, and memory span
4. The lack of sequenced and refined language arts curriculum guidelines based on Navajo pupil needs.

The barriers that the Navajo child encounters in learning English make one marvel that he does so well as he does. Idioms, similes, metaphors and multiple meanings of words can be completely baffling to him. Non-familiarity with situations--particularly many of those in reading texts makes developing the necessary experiential base a complex task. In many instances, both the language and the conceptual base of the child are still on a concrete level when he is thrown into material requiring him to function on an abstract level.

A tendency for children to learn by rote, to be almost unaware that meaning might even exist in what is being spoken or read, enhances the problems of motivation, attention, and memory span. This is not surprising, if a situation exists where much of the pattern practice is taught in this same manner.

Under such circumstances, the child becomes caught in a whirlpool of not generating conversation nor practicing reading because he has not reached a point where he can use the language he has "learned" and he cannot relate to what he has read. Therefore, he falls farther and farther behind.

In the upper grades pupils demonstrate a lack of skill in attacking words, lack of ability to keep pace or to acquire more complex skills necessary to function successfully. Related to the lack of skill development is the problem of transfer--the difficulties the child encounters in applying skills he has acquired in reacting to what is communicated to him orally or through written material, in relating what he reads to other activities and concerns, and in seeing a real purpose for learning.

These pupil problems prove that the same language arts materials are not any more suitable for all children than the same curriculum and the same methodology. These problems are evidence that materials on the market provide little with which a Navajo child can identify and consequently provide little motivation for him to want to learn. Related to the inappropriateness of materials is the inconsistency of materials that are used by some teachers who have not had sufficient training to know how to adapt and to use materials intelligently.

As the situation now exists, in some cases, something called ESL, which is interpreted to be a highly formalized set of techniques for imitating sentences and learning "patterns" is taught by teachers without sufficient education and training for from twenty minutes to an hour a day and then tucked neatly away. They then go about the business of teaching the language arts with no further thought for what has been taught as ESL or any conception that there needs to be any relationship to it.

In order to eliminate at least a good portion of these problems, sufficient training must be provided for teachers so that they can acquire a real and genuine understanding of what is going on, of what they are doing, and why they are doing it. No longer can we hold to the house-breaking tactics of the audio-lingual approach. In the hands of too many it has become a catechism. Quoting Dr. David DeCamp in a lecture at an EPDA Institute "Some aspects of language do need some automatism (through pattern practice, mim-mem drills, etc.) but it isn't the whole of the bloody language learning process." [7]

This is not to deny that science continues to make solid contributions to language teaching. Linguists have certainly contributed to a better understanding of what is being taught. Educators know well that teaching is far better for the help from this discipline. However, if teachers become too dependent on it, they may not be teaching the English language arts at all.

It is gratifying that the cognitive psychologists are reassuring us that the learner need not be conditioned like a pigeon by endless repetition and rewarding for an unvarying task. It is refreshing to read an article such as that written by Dr. Lois McIntosh which reflects the need to combine the science of teaching with the art of teaching.[8]

Dr. McIntosh has written that the art of teaching lies in remembering that language is a human activity--that we are working with human beings--not animals--not machines--and no lesson plan, no text, no curriculum, not even specially prepared materials can foresee the direction a lesson is going to take. Sequenced curriculum objectives can be developed and, indeed, they should be. Sentences can be sequenced, and indeed they should be. Activities can be structured to promote efficient achievement of goals, and they should be. But, if the teacher is not ready for the unexpected, and ready and prepared to capitalize on it, if he is not ready and eager to seize every opportunity to move ahead in promoting language growth, to encourage creativity in language learning, he is overlooking an important dimension of teaching.

The art of language teaching lies in detecting the first possible moment when learners want to break out of the mold and use language for themselves. Their language may not be accurate, but they will be using language as it should be used--to say something--to communicate.

A good language lesson should have behind it the possibilities of branching out, going back over, or going an as planned. Teachers must not get so caught up in schedules and misguided methodology that they lose sight of human behavior.

Implied in all of this is the fact that we have not yet found really effective ways to teach the English language arts to Navajo children. We have been in too much of a rush to provide instant education. We have been too anxious to push children into commercially prepared materials in all subject areas. More time needs to be devoted to teaching children to

use the English language as they learn it so that they can intuitively cope with the structure of the material they must eventually use in all subject areas.

In order to do so, certain conditions need to be met. Ideally, so far as recruitment of teachers is concerned, we should employ only elementary teachers with some education and training in teaching English as a second language. In reality, for some time to come yet, we shall, in all probability have to continue to take what we get and do the best that we can with them.

Ideally, we should require every elementary teacher to qualify as an ESL teacher within a given period of time. Arrangements should be made for a number of teachers with potential to be granted leaves of absence to become qualified to teach the language arts in a second language. There should be ongoing training in each of the five agencies of the Navajo Area throughout the school year. A six to ten-week workshop should be conducted every summer to train new teachers and to help others keep abreast. Two language arts specialists should be employed in each of the larger schools and one in each of the smaller schools to assist with the training of teachers. (Realistically we shall do well to get one in each school.)

From a practical viewpoint, initially it may be necessary to select those teachers with the most potential and work out various short-term sessions which can result in an advanced degree in the field. In this case selection should include an evaluation of the basic qualities that a supervisor knows will result in successful teaching. These qualities would include understanding and respecting students and their cultural setting, being a perceptive and involved member of the community, and demonstrated proficiency in spoken and written English to a level commensurate with the teacher's role as a language model.

A gratifying aspect of our situation is that language ability can be acquired. If teachers with above qualifications can be selected, they can be educated and trained to teach the language arts to Navajo children. Short-term training programs planned for them should contain components of language learning, practical experience, and use of audio-visual aides; e.g.

1. Language -- incorporating the structure of the English language-learning experience. Since in teaching for understanding, knowing the how doesn't help much if you don't know the why, it is important to give attention to both the structure of English as the language to be taught and to provide a language-learning experience because of the vivid insights it can provide into learning and teaching a new language.

2. Practical experience in the form of observations of model classes. Trainees need to be taught how to observe, what to look for, what to ignore. They need practice in changing focus of attention and each observation should be followed by a detailed discussion. Practical experience is also

needed in planning segments of a lesson and then a complete lesson; in peer teaching and in practice-teaching.

3. Use of audio-visual aides. Films especially can provide a maximum of exposure in a minimum of time.

Throughout all of this short-term training, understanding must be developed regarding the why of observing, planning, and practice-teaching.

That over a period of time short-term training can pay dividends is evidenced by this statement taken from Summary of Meeting on Report of the Evaluation of the ESL Programs in Navajo Area Schools:

> "Results of short-term training are beginning to snowball. Bits and pieces of training are beginning to jell through use. In comparison, those who have had short-term training are better able to cope with the program than teachers without such training."

Also from a practical standpoint, there is need to develop a systematic, continuous, creative, constructive, and democratic program of in-service training for all teachers:

1. Undergraduate and graduate programs on the Reservation.

2. Organized on-going in-service training throughout the year in each Agency of the Navajo Area.

3. Summer education, through workshops and university courses (perhaps even mandatory for those teachers who display a need) and encouraged on a continuing basis for others.

4. Reading in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics.

5. Observing experienced teachers.

Some sort of evaluation of all training is essential to determine its effectiveness. In terms of the teacher, it should be related to change in behavior. The question that needs to be answered is, "Has the training helped the teacher learn to blend many ingredients together to give pupils the kind of learning experiences which contribute to correct habits, broad interests, desirable attitudes, and knowledge as well as basic skills". Answers to such a question would involve an analysis of change in pupil behavior.

Regardless of the kind of training that is given, whether it be repeated short-term training or long term, it should provide teachers with knowledge--

1. Of English inside and out.

2. About the pupils' own background and language.

3. Concerning styles of learning--particularly in terms of age differences.

4. That the textbook is just an outline, and instruction is dictated by pupil needs with materials being used to meet those needs.

Turning to curriculum, ideally we should refine immediately the language arts curriculum guidelines, based on needs of Navajo children, which were developed by teachers and specialists. The primary objective would be to come up with a sequenced but not graded outline for the development of all phases of the language arts. The next step then would be to integrate and cross-reference this outline with those of all other disciplines.

Realistically, the guidelines will have to be refined and sequenced in as short a period of time as other demands on teachers and specialists will permit. Integration will depend upon the perceptiveness of the individual teacher to carry over into the other disciplines the structures being stressed and that have been learned, and to select content from those disciplines to be integrated into the language arts.

Ideally, materials which employ the same sequence of structure should be written for all phases of the curriculum for pre-first through third grade. In reality, materials can be written only a level at a time, first for the language arts, and after they have been refined, for the other disciplines. Teachers must be given freedom to institute teaching-learning processes based on these materials, but which reflect their own interpretation of them in relatiin to determined current needs of their pupils.

Since instruction cannot wait for the education and training of teachers nor for the writing of "custom-made" materials, the number one requirement which needs to be continually stressed and fulfilled as rapidly as possible is a clear definition of the basic objectives to be accomplished from kindergarten through eighth grade. This can result from the implementation of the total language arts curriculum previously mentioned. Ongoing evaluation and refinement need to be built in to the implementation in order for such basic objectives to be continually related to Navajo children's needs, and for sequenced but no graded objectives to become a reality. These objectives should reflect progressive ability to:

Understand a native English speaker in any situation.
Sustain a conversation with a native speaker.
Read any material in English with comprehension, ease, and enjoyment.
Write correctly, functionally and creatively.[4]

Ultimately, the purpose would be to guide each youth in developing the capacity to think in English--to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate any information communicated to him by any means.

There is a need through instruction to make certain that skills related

to perceiving, understanding, listening and speaking are developed before children are introduced tc reading and writing. To be able to understand, to be able really to listen, to be able to speak intelligently, to be able to read with comprehension, and to be able to communicate through writing a sound experiential base must be developed all along the way.

In guiding children in developing capabilities in all these phases of the language arts, confusion over "mastery" needs to be eliminated. How do you tell when one has "mastered" English as a second language? How many of us have "mastered" it as a first? If primary emphasis in the language arts is for developmental learning of English as a second language with stress on skill building as a springboard for creative use of language then it must be realized that we cannot ignore nor obliterate the fact that we are working with human beings--each of whom is different and will progress at different rates in all phases of learning. Each child has a different background, different wants and values, and different attitudes towards others, including the teacher. Obviously they will not all approach a given learning situation in the same way. Quoting President Mary, "There is a growing recognition in the field that not all learners have the capacity or the need to become experts in the use of English. We cannot ignore the functional use to which we must put English. This does not mean that standards are lowered".[4] It does mean facing reality rather than ideality.

To determine if all efforts from recruiting to instruction are paying dividends means for evaluating all efforts need to be incorporated in the progeam. Day-to-day evaluation by the teacher of the effectiveness of instruction needs to be an integral part of instruction. Various kinds of tests also need to be used. Tests need to be given to assess progress. Tests may be given to compare various groups as part of the evaluation and refinement of guidelines. It is hoped that the English proficiency test being developed by the Washington Office will help in identifying pupils who need help,in providing a placement factor in the language arts curriculum, and in measuring achievement.

The task before us is great, it is challenging rather than overwhelming. Bureau teachers have always worked against great odds and are equal to this challenge. In turn, if educators at the college level are truly concerned with the education of the masses, it behooves them to learn about all the people they have a responsibility to educate. To fail to assume this obligation is to fail to educate. The burden of this responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of all educators, and the exercise of the responsibility is long overdue.

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